DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 289 176 CS 210 874

AUTHOR Gray, Patricia S.
TITLE Connecting Literature to History for Interdisciplinary Teaching: "Antigone" and Greek History.
PUB DATE 24 Nov 87
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (77th, Los Angeles, CA, November 20-25, 1987).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Drama; *English Instruction; Experiential Learning; Greek Literature; *History Instruction; *Integrated Curriculum; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Learning Strategies; *Literature Appreciation; Prior Learning; Schemata (Cognition); Secondary Education; Student Projects; Teaching Methods; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS Antigone

ABSTRACT

Recent research suggests that information must be made meaningful to students before they will comprehend and remember it. However, because so much curriculum is learned in isolation, many students miss the connections between such disciplines as literature and history. One solution is to connect the teaching of history and literature to a focal point, such as Sophocles' play "Antigone." For instance, history and literature teachers could switch classes for a class period or two, the history teacher giving the play a historical context while the literature teacher explains literary trends of the period to the history students. Such an interdisciplinary approach could be improved with the use of prereading activities to activate students' prior learning, and teachers could allow students to set their own pace by offering a number of appropriate prestudy activities. To make use of multiple cognitive skills, students could (1) see and discuss an audiovisual presentation on ancient Greece; (2) read "Antigone" and write a plot summary; (3) listen to a tape-recording of the play; (4) locate allusions to Greek mythology in the play and analyze their meaning in the dialogue; or (5) present a scene from the play. Role playing, researching various aspects of Greek history, and writing are appropriate strategies for both history and literature students. Such an approach synthesizes knowledge from content areas and improves the quality of the instruction. (Four references are included.) (JC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED289176

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CONNECTING LITERATURE TO HISTORY FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING: ANTIGONE AND GREEK HISTORY

Presented by:

Patricia S. Gray, Language Arts Supervisor
Northside Independent School District
5900 Evers Road
San Antonio, Texas 78238
(512)647-2215

1987 Convention of The National Council of Teachers of English
Los Angeles, California

Workshop W.24 "Writing and Thinking In An Electronic World"
Tuesday, November 24, 8:30-5:00

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia S. Gray

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 210 874

CONNECTING LITERATURE TO HISTORY FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING:
ANTIGONE AND GREEK HISTORY

What was going on in 5th century Athens anyway? What was a citizen? Who were citizens? What does citizenship have to do with Greek tragedy? Literature teachers refer to Sophocles and Euripides in the same breath as Antigone and Oedipus, but students usually have little to no idea about who is real (historically) and who is not (literarily). Great works of literature and the study of history as background should be presented together by teachers who care enough to help students make connections between fact and fiction, history and literature.

Interdisciplinary studies can be designed to allow sudents and teachers to engage in reading, listening, thinking, speaking, and writing about a common body of knowledge. For example, the study of Sophocles' play Antigone could be prefaced with shared information, speculation, and anticipation by teachers and students alike. What an opportunity for teachers of literature and history to get together, prepare together, teach together, and model for students the concepts that learning does not occur in isolation, that writers of history and writers of literature may portray events in different ways, and that historical knowledge enriches the study of a work of literature, and vice versa.

The history of a particular time and place, as well as the setting of a literary work can be enhanced with music, pictures, slides, filmstrips, movies, video recordings, and other audio and visual presentations. The history teacher could trade classes with the English teacher for a day or two to lead the introduction to Greek history. In the world history class the English teacher could present various kinds of pre-reading and pre-writing activities to stimulate the history students to explore new avenues to "learning history."

Such strategies as brainstorming, listing, clustering, webbing, or even free writing could lead students to vigorous inquiry into the relevance of events from the 5th century B. C. to the 20th century. Geography through map study might also be appropriate as an introductory activity, or pre-reading activity.

Issues and topics in Antigone such as civil disobedience, loyalty to family, allegiance to government, adherence to tradition, women's rights, political structures, democracy, and others generated by brainstorming with the students can show that interdisciplinary learning is a wonderful way to juxtapose information and facts with ideas and imagination. Students can work alone, in pairs, or in groups in order to select issues or topics for investigation and presentation prior to, during, and after the history and the literary work are actually read and studied.

Student involvement in learning should be recursive in order to provide opportunitiies for the learners to set their own paces. That is, teachers may suggest a variety of activities which may be appropriate for pre-study or introduction of the texts, for presentations accompanying a specific daily in-class procedure, or for post-unit productions.

Convincing students to participate actively in reading, thinking, questioning, and investigating such subjects as Athenian democracy in order to understand Greek tragedy is a large undertaking even for highly motivated teachers. Many students and some teachers may be comfortable with a horrid version of the three R's as "read, remember, repeat." That method is surely safer and takes much less effort on the part of all involved. As Steve Pearse says in Roots In The Sawdust (1985), many students are "well schooled in passive learning. The teacher's job (is) to dole out the information; hers (the student's) is to absorb and recite it (11)."

Many activities can be created for any unit of study which provides opportunities for students to engage in more than one kind of learning. Using Antigone as the literary text and the history of ancient Greece with a focus on Athenian democracy as background, teachers may create different tasks to achieve different levels of understanding to meet the needs of many kinds of learners.

In her article, "Integrating Instruction in Reading, Writing, and Reasoning," Marilyn Sternglass points out that current research by Kenneth Goodman "has alerted us to the importance of providing our students with links between their own experience and knowledge and the reading texts they use (The Writer's Mind, 153). She also supports the practice of providing students with pre-reading activities to prepare them for the actual texts, both factual and fictional:

> Students must be introduced to the conceptual framework of the reading with which they will be interacting through carefully constructed pre-reading activities that will relate their own knowledge base and background to the new information contained in the text (154).

In order to present these assignments consisting of different cognitive skills, i. e., reading, writing, listening, thinking, and speaking, on as many levels of learning as possible (knowledge, analysis, application, synthesis, evaluation), an English class might be offered options:

1. View and hear audio visual presentation of background on 5th century Greece. Follow with discussion to require students to process new information, analyze, and perhaps synthesize what they have seen and heard. (pre-study)

2. Students can read the play and write a plot summary--the traditional and first level of understanding, recall of facts. (during)

3. Use audio tape of the play for students to hear the spoken dialogue. Perhaps just certain scenes would be of interest and not the entire play. (during)

4. Have students go through text of the play and locate allusions to Greek mythology. Apply the allusions to interpret meanings for their importance to comprehension and effect. (pre-, during, and post-)

5. Listen to recording of Greek music. Students might compose a song in that style to play and sing. They could use words from the Chorus, for example, or use various lines of dialogue. (during or post-)

6. Memorize or read with a partner or group any scene to present live, on audio or video tape, perhaps in costume--a sheet for a toga will do! (during or post-)

Bruce Petersen, Director of the Language Skills Laboratory at Michigan Technological University, makes several points about using both reading and writing in all disciplines. In his article, "In Search of Meaning: Readers and Expressive Language," he writes, "Reading, listening, speaking, and writing share an expressive or personal base which ... constitutes the heart of the learning process in any discipline which depends on language or symbolic forms in its teaching and practice (Language Connections, 115)". He quotes James Britton, "Language is the sum total of talking, listening, reading, and writing. No one of these four modes is more important than the others, and all should be developed equally (116)."

Most importantly, I think, Petersen says, "We all begin thinking about new information through the resources of our past knowledge and associations. One of our jobs as teachers is to assist students in moving beyond personal knowledge to knowledge shared by a community. Learning and the development of knowledge are, after all, social. Learning depends on shared knowledge (119)." What better method than having students and teachers of both history and literature working together for fuller understanding through different kinds of representations of the ancient past?

Meanwhile, in the world history class, the English teacher can be filling the students in on how the great writers of all periods of history have portrayed events through various genres, especially drama. The teacher of literature will be sure to mention that while historians usually utilize fact as meticulously as they can, playwrights and other writers take many liberties with history as it actually occurred. Many opportunities for cross-teaching of humanities exist in such a collaborative teacher situation, and even the most rigid curriculum guide can surely provide time slots for such enrichment to take place.

Activities which might prove useful to world history students can be created just as those for the English classes, using the same kinds of reading, listening, thinking, speaking, and writing skills. Curriculum requirements (called Essential Elements in Texas) can be matched to or made to fit the situation. (Like the bed of Procrustes!) Possibilities to consider, refine, and adapt might be:

1. Role play a citizen of 5th century Athens. Speak to your classmates about a woman defying the king on a family matter which results in civil disobedience. Make notecards to use while speaking.
2. Debate the legality and enforcibility of the king's decree not to bury a dead soldier.
3. Research the various kinds of clothing worn by Athenian citizens, soldiers, and royalty, both male and female. Draw, make, or otherwise re-create costumes of the period.
4. Make a map of a Greek city showing the topography and geography which would explain the life styles of the times.
5. What kinds of weapons were used in 5th century in Greece? Photocopy, draw, or actually make examples, accompanied by written descriptions to present the class and display in the trophy case of your building.
6. Did the Greeks use flags? Banners? Shields? What symbols of family, city, army, or kingdom were used? Locate information and use it to produce facsimiles for display.

These kinds of optional assignments and activities are not "too elementary" for high school students, although often such strategies are left behind in elementary school. It should go without saying, but I shall say it anyway, that all the options should be designed to involve students in gathering, compiling, and using specific information, and should ultimately result in writing of some kind. Getting students involved in the learning that is to occur in any class is a first step toward providing long term knowledge.

In an article entitled "Assigning and Evaluating Transactional Writing" Toby Fulwiler says, "Asking for the student's answer <u>in writing</u> should be an important pedagogical decision, not simply a trade-off in time. Asking for a piece of writing involves students more profoundly in the learning process; they must demonstrate not only "knowledge" but also the ability to organize and explain that knowledge" (<u>Language Connections</u>, 47-48). James Britton, a proponent of writing in all classes, divides the process of writing into three stages: conception, incubation, and production (7), at least two and part of the third should occur in the classroom. That is, the concept of interdisciplinary learning can be part of the introduction to the unit of study, and the open discussion of possibilities for students' choices will stimulate many suggestions from the students themselves. Time to think

about the different kinds of rhetorical situations which might be created will allow students and teachers to go through the process of elimination--narrow the possibilities down to size, so to speak. Finally, the creation of the products can (and should) be started in the classroom with much guidance from the teacher with specific class time designated for work in progress such as library work, planning, drafting, shaping, and certainly sharing--reading, reacting, responding--then only the final stages of preparation for presenting and publishing will shift to the students' own responsibilities outside class.

If we are to pursue interdisciplinary learning, and if we are committed to improving instruction, thus promoting student learning, all teachers of all content areas must work together to invite students into the community of acquired knowledge. Using writing to learn is one proven route. John W. Myers promotes this approach in his Phi Delta Kappa Fastback #209:

> The writing to learn approach is sufficiently established to warrant investigation by all secondary school teachers. The approach does not steal time from instruction; it enhances and clarifies instructional content. It encourages student thought and the synthesis of knowledge in the content areas. The approach does not ask other teachers to do the job of the English teacher; it is not intended to teach only writing skills. However, the approach can pay big dividends in the quality of learning. The result of the approach is improved learning, not just improved writing (Writing To Learn Across The Curriculum, 9).

Contributed by: Patricia S. Gray
Northside Independent School District
5900 Evers Road
San Antonio, Texas 78238
(512)647-2215

References

Fulwiler, Toby and Art Young, eds., Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum, NCTE, 1982.

Gere, Anne Ruggles, Editor, Roots In The Sawdust: Writing To Learn Across the Disciplines, NCTE, 1985.

Hays, Janice N., The Writer's Mind: Writing As A Mode of Learning, NCTE, 1983.

Meyers, John W., Writing to Learn Across the Curriculum, Phi Delta Kappa Fastback #209: Bloomington, IN, 1984.